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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000281

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI (TROBERTS), NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY), NEA/P (FFINVER), IIP/G/NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAQ](#) [SOCI](#) [ETRD](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: CALL TO BOYCOTT US GOODS AND ANOTHER

JOURNALIST BANNED

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¶11. Summary: The Omani Internet chat rooms "Al-Sablah" and "Al-Majarra" are the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language fora for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, these popular sites nevertheless offer a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

--- Boycott American Consumer Products
--- Another Omani Writer Banned

End summary.

Saying No to American Products

¶12. An al-Sablah member recently created a list of American consumer products that -- in his view -- Omanis should boycott. "If all of us cooperate and boycott these products, the Americans will have to consider the feelings of other countries, instead of always exerting U.S. influence. We should not support the economic killing of our merchants and businesses by purchasing American products that ultimately support the American economy while hurting our own," the author stated. Many respondents agreed, and began adding additional products to the ever-growing list, suggesting local purchase alternatives such as "Zamzam Cola for Coca-Cola or Pepsi-Cola, Crisps for Pringles, Miswak for Close-Up or Crest."

¶13. The advocates of such a boycott included one member who wrote, "Ridding our economy of American domination would be a good thing. We must assume control of the consumerism in our country and help ourselves." However, others were suspicious of the underlying reasons that led to the call for a boycott, and cautioned, "Remember, some American products rely on Omani workers to process, market and sell them, which means they are essentially providing employment to Omani citizens. These products help, rather than hurt, our economy."

Crossing the Line

¶14. Another recent topic in Al-Sablah centered on the investigation of another Omani journalist, who erroneously reported figures relating to recent arrests in Oman. The journalist, Mohamed Saif Al-Rahbi (Assistant to the Chief Editor of "Oman", a leading government-owned Arabic language daily) identified himself in the online forum and claimed, "I was banned because of the article I published in "Al-Hayat" newspaper that many feel denigrated the reputation of Oman." A number of respondents chastised Mr. Al-Rahbi, saying "Of course you were banned, you presented untrue facts when you suggested that the government arrested nearly 300 scholars when it was more like 13. Who or what is your source? You provide no basis for your figures!" Other more sympathetic members offered, "We think that the government is just trying to terrorize any journalist that dares to cross the defined red line of what is okay to say and what is not, even if it is the truth."

BALTIMORE